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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 006665

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/13/2021
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY,S KURDS' EXPECTATIONS SINKING AS ELECTION
SEASON STARTS

REF: A. ANKARA 6567
[1](#)B. ANKARA 6589

Classified By: Adana Principal Officer Eric Green, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Kurdish leaders in Turkey's southeast have concluded that serious discussion of the Kurdish issue will be trumped by nationalistic posturing until after next year's elections. Continuation of the PKK ceasefire, which is universally welcomed in the region, is threatened by ongoing violence which most believe is initiated by the security forces. Residents returning to their villages after being evacuated in anti-PKK fighting in the 1980's and 90's are finally receiving some compensation from the government but this chance for the government to win some trust is being undercut by allegations of corruption and, in the case of Syriac Christians, paranoid harassment by local officials. With the up-tick in violence, human rights groups accuse government forces of serious police abuse of Kurdish activists and PKK fighters. There is widespread suspicion/paranoia - unsubstantiated - that GOT forces used chemical weapons against the PKK. Flood victims in Batman, the city hit hardest by recent heavy flooding in the southeast, may be further victimized as they find themselves in the midst of squabbling between the national government, the local Democratic Society Party (DTP) municipal administration and the local Justice and Development Party (AKP) over which can be seen to be doing the most to bring relief to the victims. End summary.

As Nationalist Rhetoric Escalates, Kurdish
Politicians Take Cover

[1](#)2. (U) In recent travel, Adana officers visited Van, Diyarbakir, Tunceli, Elazig, Mardin, Cizre and Batman in southeastern Turkey to meet with local officials and NGO representatives and assess the status of the PKK's October 1 cease-fire declaration.

[1](#)3. (C) Diyarbakir mayor Osman Baydemir (DTP) said that as national elections loom next year, he believes the Kurdish issue will be used by various groups to burnish their

nationalist credentials with no regard for seeking a solution. As an example, he believes the current military operations against the PKK are motivated by the Turkish military's desire to keep PM Erdogan on the defensive (and away from the presidency) by showing the public that the PM can't keep the country at peace. Baydemir added that the operations keep all interested parties on notice that a possible large-scale operation into Northern Iraq is still on the table. He also criticized the GOT for failing to lower the election threshold to allow the main Kurdish party, the DTP, to have a chance of entering the parliament.

14. C) In this context, Baydemir was resigned to seeing no progress - but also not too much regression - in the process of liberalizing Turkey's political system to accommodate Kurdish aspirations. Baydemir praised True Path Party (DYP) Chairman Mehmet Agar's recent comments recommending the GOT consider an amnesty for PKK fighters to help resolve the Kurdish issue. In addition to introducing a taboo topic into the national discourse, Baydemir said he was gratified that, when the military criticized the statement, Agar held his ground and even pushed back. By contrast, Erdogan gave in to military pressure and retreated from his August 2005 pledge to take on the Kurdish issue, according to Baydemir.

PKK Ceasefire in Doubt

15. (C) The PKK ceasefire that went into effect on October 1 is widely supported throughout the southeast, but continued violence, which locals attribute to the GOT's rejection of the ceasefire, has led the PKK to publicly threaten to resume combat. Mayor Baydemir told us he has grown progressively

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less optimistic in recent months because of the GOT's aggressive response to the PKK's cease-fire declaration. The Human Rights Association in Siirt as well as Sirnak (DTP) Mayor Mehmet Ertak told us that anti-PKK operations throughout the southeast have increased since the declaration of the ceasefire, and threaten to upset the fragile peace that the ceasefire was meant to create. Ertak said that foreign governments, like the USG, should work harder to perpetuate the ceasefire. According to one journalist, as PKK units retreat to inaccessible terrain or across international borders, GOT forces may find it relatively easy to attack them. Though the PKK claims its own operations are now limited to "self-defense", it has initiated offensive actions in recent weeks including a fatal attack on a military helicopter using an IED.

Some Compensation - Finally - for Displaced Villagers

16. (C) After years of delays, the GOT is now providing compensation to thousands of villagers who were forced to leave their homes in the 1990s as part of the conflict with the PKK. Diyarbakir's deputy governor, Erol Ozer, stated that throughout the province about 42,000 applications for compensation were received and of those, 9,000 have now been adjudicated with 7,900 accepted. The average award is between 20,000 and 30,000 YTL (about \$14,000 to \$21,000), though some are as high as 100,000 (about \$71,000) depending on the family's house and the value of crops and livestock lost due to the forced departures. According to a trusted NGO consulate contact, the compensation program in Diyarbakir has been compromised because the governor's office has coerced many of those receiving compensation to "donate" some of their money to the local soccer team, whose owner was recently appointed to the governor's staff.

17. (C) Similarly, the return of a modest number of Syriac Christian villagers from Europe and western Turkey to the Midyat region has prompted paranoid reactions among local

officials. Bishop Aktas of the Mor Gabriel Monastery told us that some local government officials were nervous that well-off Syriac returnees, whom they accuse of building "New York Villas" in their villages, were attempting to re-establish a Syriac Christian presence in a region that had, in the decade since the evacuation of those villages, been partially re-populated with mostly Muslim residents. Aktas told us that the local Sub-Governor, accompanied by two other unidentified officials, recently visited him and asked him what part he played regarding renewed talk in the media about an historical "Syriac genocide." Aktas denied any involvement, and suggested that the officials check with the media outlets involved. The officials also warned Aktas that the monastery should cease teaching the Aramaic language to the few dozen Syriac children who board at the monastery and attend local Turkish schools.

Maltreatment by Police Continues

18. (C) Human Rights Association (HRA) offices in the southeast continue to report abuses by the police and military against captured PKK fighters and the mutilation of corpses of insurgents killed in clashes. Malatya HRA told us that PKK insurgents incarcerated in the local prison were often kept in isolation, denied access to family or to any kind of Kurdish language literature or broadcasts, and were sometimes exposed to harsh temperatures without proper clothing. Both HRA offices further reported that the local police have undertaken a new tactic of encouraging lynchings by agitated crowds against troublemakers as a sort of replacement for post-arrest torture by police.

19. (C) Human rights activists in Siirt and Diyarbakir stated that eyewitnesses in the Bingol-Mus region, where anti-PKK operations are the most intense, recently reported seeing burned and mutilated corpses of militants killed in clashes, with fingers, hands, noses, ears or other body parts cut off.

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They also claimed that the reports of burns on the corpses might indicate the use of chemical weapons by security forces. We have seen no medical or other expert confirmation of these claims, which are most likely baseless. Nonetheless, local suspicion of the security forces is now such that such accusations are gaining traction in this region, a commentary on the continued deterioration of trust.

Post-flood Politics in Batman

110. (SBU) Batman was one of the hardest-hit cities in the southeast by the early-October heavy floods that devastated villages and infrastructure throughout the region. Nearly 800 homes, mostly "gecekodu" squatter structures built in a dry riverbed area south of the city, and nearly 3000 residents were directly affected by the flooding in Batman. The Turkish Red Crescent, with the help of Batman municipality and some NGOs, has set up tent and container cities, and provides three meals per day for over 2600 flood victims. The GOT mass housing authority (TOKI) has begun preparations for building the first 1200 new homes for the flood victims. The Batman Bar Association told us that their best estimate shows that the victims will have to spend a minimum of two winters in their current, substandard living conditions before they might be able to purchase (with long-term, low-interest government loans) new homes.

111. (C) Meanwhile, the Governor's office has rejected the City Council's request to place heavy machinery at the disposal of the DTP-run municipality for post-flood clean-up and infrastructure repair. The Governor's office argued that the machinery belongs to the central government, but the Bar Association told us that the government wants to avoid

letting the DTP get too much credit for the clean-up. Our discussions with the Bar Association and the Batman Provincial AK Party confirmed that the AKP, too, wants to be seen as playing a high-profile role in post-flood relief efforts, using their Ankara connections to outflank Batman's (pro-PKK extremist) DTP Mayor's office in the competition for votes in next year's general elections.

Comment

¶12. (C) As with other urgent priorities on Turkey's agenda such as the need for progress on its EU bid, pre-election paralysis and pandering will likely preclude any serious discussion - let alone progress - on the Kurdish issue. But neglecting Turkey's Kurdish region carries higher costs now as events move forward in neighboring Iraq. While the level of violence and fear is significantly lower than a decade ago, impatience with the GOT's lack of attention is growing, together with a willingness - present at the height of the conflict in the 1990's - to attribute the worst to Turkish security forces. Van's politically moderate Chamber of Commerce President, Zahir Kandasoglu, summarized the situation simply: "If the government doesn't do something about southeast Turkey, it will fall apart just like Iraq. We need investment and the freedom to use our language and culture."

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